VII

DANTE AND ENGLISH LITERATURE

AFTER a sermon a wag remarked that he owned a book which contained every word of the discourse. Challenged to produce it, he indicated the unabridged dictionary. Not "every word" of this lecture, but much of the material out of which it is built is in three books: Paget Toynbee's "Dante in English Literature from Chaucer to Cary," Oscar Kuhns' "Dante and the English Poets from Chaucer to Tennyson," and some essays appended to Dean Plumptre's translation of the "Divine Comedy" and the "Canzoniere." Of course I have reviewed the pertinent works of the chief English authors here concerned and have consulted available critical authorities on these, but Toynbee, Kuhns, and Plumptre have collected so much material that my problem to-day is to condense and organize rather than to amplify.

I am working under a double limitation, of time and your patience; sixty minutes in which to recite six hundred years of literary history, and an unexciting topic: literary influences, a matter of historical investigation, detail and minutiæ, interesting to the investigator, but wearisome to readers, intolerable to hearers. In the circumstances I must do violence to the scientific method of handling such a topic, must generalize rather than particularize. Even with this concession I do not visualize you straining in your seats with anxious expectancy to catch each uttered word. The best I can hope is that you will be in the attitude of mind of Dr. Johnson on the eve of his visit to the Scottish highlands:

he said he would not hope not to be disgusted with the highlands, he would only hope to conceal his disgust.

You realize that I am not to talk about Dante, but about reflections of Dante in English literature. Reflections are pale things, shadows, not substances. One thing I have learned in this investigation, that even when English reflection of Dante throws little light on Dante, it throws back considerable light on English literature. Face to face with Dante, an English author or literary epoch has his or its native traits accentuated: Chaucer's naïveté becomes more naïve when he speaks of Dante or uses Dante's inventions; English eighteenth-century self-complacency is more marked when typical authors of the period turn flippantly to Dante—or away from him; nineteenth-century seriousness and subtlety are more pronounced when the authors of the epoch come within the zone of Dante's influence.

A remark of Lowell's has been constantly in my mind while preparing this talk. It is in the form of a simile, not an elegant simile, for it associates things lofty and commonplace—Dante's poetry and street advertising. Lowell was an American. But perhaps because it is homely it sticks in the mind, and it states a fact about Dante and his readers. "Dante's thought," says Lowell, "is multiform, and like certain street signs once common, presents a different image according to the point of view." Dante "reads" differently from different angles. Devout Roman Catholics have found in him a defender of the faith, but sixteenth-century reformationists, like Bishop Jewel and John Foxe, interpreted him as a precursor of the Reformation—not catching, or caring to catch, Dante's discrimination between the papacy, always holy, and certain Popes, like Boniface VIII, whose political acts were not holy. To a trifler like Horace Walpole Dante was "absurd," but to a moralist like Cole-

ridge he was sublime. Carlyle was stimulated by Dante's theology; Rossetti, indifferent to theology, was captivated by Dante's art; Ruskin was drawn to him by many strands, as moralist, medievalist, and artist. What one gets from Dante depends in part on what he takes to Dante.

This fact of various reactions to Dante has determined my method of presentation, to ignore linear details and to try to show how personalities of authors and traits of periods are revealed by such reactions.

Of course it must first be determined whether or not there exists any Dante influence in a given author. The fact must be established before inferences can be drawn. But Toynbee and Kuhns reason sanely toward the fact, reject mere coincidence as evidence of borrowing. Resemblances in thought, even in plan, structure, and expression, are sometimes fortuitous, due to similar minds in similar circumstances operating in similar ways. For instance, there are resemblances between "Piers Plowman" and the "Divine Comedy" which have sometimes led to the assumption that Langland was acquainted with the "Comedy"; but undoubtedly Ambassador Jusserand is correct in holding that the likeness is coincidental, not derivative, or, as he says, due "to the analogy of the subjects and the casual similarity of the two poets' moods." One critic, having read in the "Inferno" that Branca D'Orio

> Eats, drinks, and sleeps, and putteth raiment on,

concluded that Shakespeare must have read Dante because he had the Duke in "Measure for Measure" say:

> "I drink, I eat, array myself, and live."

It is conceivable that a Shakespeare could have thought of that for himself, without assistance.

Again, Dante was himself sometimes a borrower, and a subsequent author may be borrowing from Dante's source rather than from Dante. Dante may have had in mind a sentence from Boethius' "Consolation of Philosophy," one of the books which early influenced him, when he put into Francesca's mouth the words,

> No greater grief than to remember days
> Of joy when misery is at hand.

Boethius had written "In omni adversitate fortunae infelicissimum genus est infortunii fuisse felicem et non esse." In "Troilus and Criseyde" Chaucer wrote:

> For of Fortune's sharp adversitee
> The worst kinde of infortune is this,
> A man to have been in prosperitee,
> And it remembren, whan it passed is.

As Chaucer translated the "Consolation of Philosophy" into English, he probably drew the thought directly from Boethius rather than through the medium of Dante. Later, Gawin Douglas, in his version of the Æneid, wrote:

> The maist onsilly kynd of fortoun is
> To have been happy: Boetius teaches so.

This is one of the passages which, in connection with others, has led to a suspicion that Douglas may have read Dante, but, clearly, this is poor evidence, as he distinctly names Boethius. The most familiar rendering of the thought is Tennyson's line in "Locksley Hall":

> This is truth the Poet sings,
> That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things,

where, by "the Poet," Tennyson presumably means Dante. This is an example of a thought so much used that little can be proved by its use. It is almost common property, for it

expresses a common truth sanctioned by well-nigh universal experience, for multitudes who know not the poets and philosophers know that they add a sting to unhappiness by recalling how they were once happy.

Again, the mere fact that an earlier English author mentioned Dante's name does not prove that he knew Dante's literary work, any more than a present-day reference to Aristides the Just proves that a person knows anything about Aristides beyond the fact that he was called "the Just," and, perhaps, that it is reported (with some exaggeration) that the froward Athenians grew so weary of hearing him called "the Just" that they banished him. In Toynbee's encyclopedic work over two hundred and fifty English authors are cited in connection with Dante in the five hundred years following his birth, but of these probably not twenty-five really knew much about his poetry, and not half a dozen came under its influence in any significant manner. Within the last hundred years there is altogether a different story, a multitude of English-speaking-and-writing people formatively influenced by Dante's thought and art.

Dante's influence on English literature began promptly and decisively with Chaucer, but it did not continue consecutively, for reasons to be noted presently. Between Chaucer and Milton, a period of nearly two hundred and fifty years, there is not much unquestionable evidence of a strong Dante influence in English literature, though there are, in that interval, wide fields of speculation and considerable difference of opinion about this or that author's relationship to Dante. In such cases—Spenser is an outstanding example—I incline to the conservative position of Toynbee and Kuhns, to the verdict "not proven." Lowell was emphatic in his declaration that the Spenserian in-

debtedness to Dante was enormous, and any opinion of Lowell's about either Dante or Spenser must be treated with respect; but as time goes on and scholars discover more and more of what may be called the machinery of allegory in the past, it becomes more doubtful that a resemblance implies an indebtedness. Furthermore, the equivocal style in which Spenser wrote makes it difficult sometimes to "pin him down" and draw a definite deduction from his lines. In this respect he is like the other Elizabethans, "only," as the Irishman said, "more so." They talked much and they talked wonderfully, did those Elizabethans, but they often talked so ambiguously, so "euphuistically" (to use the word in a loose sense), that reasoning about their meaning affords opportunities for varied deductions. That is one reason why we find a "problem" at almost any point at which we dip into Elizabethan literature. It is significant, as has been said by others, that Spenser does not name Dante among the poets whom he enumerates as those avowedly "followed." There is an earlier sixteenth-century poet, Sir David Lyndsay, in whose poem "The Dreme" there are striking resemblances to the "Divine Comedy," but as it is possible to explain these resemblances on the score of similarities of theme and the common poetic material of the age, shared by many, the cautious critic hesitates to affirm that Sir David ever read the "Divine Comedy." So I return to my statement that between Chaucer and Milton we cannot positively affirm much Dantean influence in English literature.

As to the fact that Chaucer read the "Divine Comedy" there is no doubt, though there is variance of opinion as to how well he understood and how much he used what he read. He was sent on two diplomatic missions to Italy and became acquainted (how early is one of the debated ques-

tions) with the Italian language and some Italian literature, including Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch. It is believed that he took home a copy of the "Divine Comedy," the first to reach England. He mentioned Dante by name six times in his poetry, used the terza-rima in one of his poems ("Compleynt to his Lady"), translated, or paraphrased, from Dante several passages, including the Ugolino episode, the first English version of the most frequently translated episode of the "Divine Comedy," and, it may be incidentally remarked, the first Dantean subject of an English painting, a canvas exhibited by Sir Joshua Reynolds at the Royal Academy in 1773, "Count Hugolino and his children in the dungeon, as described by Dante, in the thirty-third canto of the 'Inferno.' "

In the prologue to the "Second Nun's Tale" there is a paraphrase of the Invocation to Mary in the opening lines of the thirty-third canto of the "Paradiso." The "Ballade of Gentillesse" raises the question of the true nature of nobility, but owes nothing directly to Dante's famous discussion of the topic in the "Convivio," for Chaucer was not acquainted with the "Convivio"; but a passage in the "Wife of Bath's Tale" on the same subject translates three lines direct from the seventh canto of the "Purgatorio" and credits Dante by name with the quotation. There are about one hundred lines in Chaucer which are unquestionably taken from Dante, including four repetitions in four different poems of one of Francesca's lines, a line which evidently fascinated Chaucer:

> Amor che al cor gentil ratto s'apprende.
> (Love that in gentle heart is quickly learnt.)

How much or how little Chaucer owed to Dante for ideas and poetic inventions, especially in "The House of

Fame," is a question too involved and dubious to be discussed in a little space; but there are passages in "The House of Fame" and elsewhere which interestingly illustrate temperamental differences between the two men.

Here are the two greatest poets of the Middle Ages, the Englishman born probably nineteen years after the death of the Italian; both with the medieval taste for allegory and moralizing, but in most other respects different: the Englishman blithe, the Italian severe; the Englishman companionable, "of their fellowship anon," the Italian sternly aloof, sometimes silent and sometimes sarcastic even at the table of his host and patron; the Englishman humorous, the Italian laughing seldom, and then somewhat sardonically; the Englishman modest, the Italian with the sort of egotism which usually marks a great nature conscious of a great mission in a misguided world; the Englishman tolerant of the motley human pageant, and apparently not absorbingly interested in either politics or religion; the Italian a political exile, immersed in religious thought, inflexible, fiercely condemnatory of men's follies and failings. How did the younger and gentler man react to the older and sterner? How did Chaucer use what he borrowed from Dante, and, in using it, how did he unconsciously show temperamental differences between himself and Dante? Two or three examples must suffice for illustration.

Consider how Dante told and Chaucer retold the story of Ugolino and his sons in the Tower of Hunger; Dante's narrative in the thirty-second and thirty-third cantos of the "Inferno" is a terrific picture of eternal vengeance visited upon inhuman ferocity, mingled with political invective and grim pathos. Ugolino pauses from gnawing Archbishop Ruggieri's head to relate how the archbishop had confined Ugolino and his sons in the tower, how one day

Ugolino heard the door below being nailed up and "turned to stone," knowing it was the verdict of starvation, how in his agony he bit his hands, how his sons, thinking it was for hunger, begged him to eat them, how for their sakes he controlled his rage, how one by one they died, how he, grown blind, groped for two days over their dead bodies: "Then hunger did for me what sorrow could not do." Having told his tale, "he again seized the wretched skull with his teeth which were strong, like a dog's gnawing a bone." This story, which, as related by Dante, has burned into the imaginations of poets and painters, concludes with Dante's stern rebuke of Pisa, where all this occurred—Pisa, disgrace of Italy—and the desire that the Arno should flood it, "so that every person in you shall be drowned." "For even if Count Ugolino was reported to have betrayed you in your strongholds, you were not justified in so torturing his sons." As Chaucer paraphrases this story, in his "Monk's Tale," there is nothing about Ugolino's hellish vengeance, or Italian politics, or the guilt of Pisa. All is pity and pathos, the center of interest is the children, their helplessness and suffering, their filial love and proffered sacrifice, their hunger, pain, and death, as one by one "They leyde hem in his lappe adoun and deyde." This is the same Chaucer who, in the "Prioresse's Tale," took a familiar story of alleged Jewish cruelty and turned it into a pathetic tale of a little child's lovableness, suffering, and death by violence, laying the chief emphasis on this human aspect of a typical medieval story of race antagonism and religious frenzy.

Again, a long passage in "The House of Fame" describes Chaucer borne aloft by an eagle (even as Dante was transported by an eagle in the ninth canto of the "Purgatorio"), and how at a great height the eagle bade Chaucer look back

at the earth (even as Beatrice bade Dante "look downward" from Paradise, canto twenty-two). It is immaterial how much of this was drawn from Dante, how much from Cicero's "Somnium Scipionis," how much was invented by Chaucer himself; there is the typical temperamental difference between Dante and Chaucer in similar circumstances. Haughty Dante looked downward

> and saw this little globe
> So pitiful of semblance that perforce
> It moved my smiles—

smiles of derision—

> —him in truth I hold
> For wisest who esteems it least.

Dante, possessing the cosmic imagination beyond all other poets, surveys the entire planetary system through which Beatrice has just guided him, and sees, with characteristic scorn, this little planet of ours,

> This petty area over which we stride
> So fiercely.

Five hundred years later Thomas Carlyle was to reflect this mood of Dante's, this fierce scorn of mankind's petty pride and proud pettiness. But naïf Chaucer, neither cosmic nor disdainful, is like an eager child looking over the parapet of a high tower, and astonished at how tiny big familiar things have become—"hills," "forests," "great beasts," "cities," "ships sailing on the sea,"—"all ho bigger than a pin prick."

One more illustration: Dante's approach to the last cantica of the "Divine Comedy," the "Paradiso," is perhaps the most solemn thing in secular literature (if, indeed, the "Divine Comedy" should be called "secular"). He is obsessed with the majesty and blinding splendor of his theme

and the importance of this "last labor" ("l'ultimo lavoro"). Hitherto the inspiration of the Muses has been sufficient, but now he needs the added aid of divine inspiration, which he solicits under the guise of Apollo, promising that if Apollo shall be aidant,

> Then shalt thou behold me of thy favored tree (the laurel)
> Come to the foot and crown myself with leaves:
> For to that honor, thou and my high theme
> Will fit me.

There is a verbal liberty in Cary's translation of *matera* ("subject") as "high theme," but the context shows that this is the *spirit* of the passage. It *is* of "high theme" that Dante is thinking, the highest possible, an account of

> His glory, by whose might all things are moved,

as runs the opening line of the "Cantica." Dante is consciously fulfilling the vow registered in the "Vita Nuova," that, if his life shall be spared, he will "say that . . . which was never yet said. . . ." When Chaucer arrives at "this litel laste book" of "The House of Fame," he also, in conscious imitation of Dante, seeks Apollo's aid, and promises that, if it is vouchsafed, then will he go

> Unto the nexte laure I see
> And kiss hit, for hit is thy tree.

Here the austere, confident Dante and the naïf, modest Chaucer are in characteristic contrast: "This litel laste book" is typical of Chaucer, "My high theme" is typical of Dante. At the laurel tree Dante will crown *himself,* as proud emperors take the symbol of sovereignty in their *own* hands and place it on their *own* brows, but Chaucer will just walk up to the first laurel tree he sees and kiss it lovingly for the sake of him who was kind and who loves this tree.

Proud Dante's lines become meek and modest when gentle Chaucer adopts them to his humbler needs.

After Chaucer, there is no strong positive influence of Dante on English literature until Milton. Civil war in the fifteenth century almost suffocated literature in England, and, consequently, we hear little of Dante. Lydgate mentions him several times, but it is certain that he never read Dante's writings. Had he done so, he would not have made the statement which has raised so much critical dust, that Chaucer translated Dante into English. Chaucer never did.

The great sixteenth-century revival of literature in England was largely a result of stimulation from Italy, but the stimulus came from Renaissance Italians, and Dante was pre-Renaissance. In the drama of the period, than which no greater literature has been produced in England, there is no trace of Dantean influence. Shakespeare knew not Dante, though those critics who argue from parallelisms have asserted the contrary; but whoever pauses to consider how much and how frankly Shakespeare borrowed from the books which he unquestionably did read will recognize the validity of Dr. Furnival's remark, that if Shakespeare had read Dante he would have left us in no doubt about it. What has already been said about Spenser and Sir David Lyndsay will apply to other authors in this period. At most it is an open question whether or not they had read the "Comedy." As for Puttenham's statement that Wyatt and Surrey imitated Dante, that is like Lydgate's statement that Chaucer had translated Dante, purely apocryphal, but misleading to many. Dante's name is mentioned fairly frequently during the century, but mostly in translations from the Italians or in conventional association of his name with the names of Petrarch and Boccaccio. Toward the end of

the century some Englishmen, like Sir John Harington, undoubtedly read the "Divine Comedy," but they were probably few, and what they drew from Dante was unimportant. It strikes me as a significant fact that the first undoubted reference to Dante's Beatrice is in Sir Philip Sidney's "Apologie for Poetry," written in 1581, published in 1595. That in an age of idealistic and romantic amatory verse there is no reference to this famous love, is, to my mind, conclusive evidence that the poets in general knew nothing about it. The temper of the English sixteenth century was the temper of Renaissance Italy, a glorified humanism rather than the intense idealism of Dante. There was destined to be another epoch of strong Italian influence on English literature, in the nineteenth century, but this was to blend with a spiritualization of the English literary mind due to many causes, and it was in that era that Dante really entered into English literature.

In the sixteenth century there was considerable increase of English knowledge of Dante as a distinguished Italian figure, and it is quite clear that a number of authors read the "Divine Comedy," but it is surprising how few responded to the *poetry* of it. Some, like Jeremy Taylor and Bishop Stillingfleet, cite Dante in support of certain theological doctrines; some, like Sir Thomas Browne, Robert Burton, and Thomas Heywood, cull quaint learning from him; John Dryden refers to his influence in "refining" the Italian language; histories and books of travel mention him in connection with thirteenth-century political history; but that Dante was by way of being a great *poet* seems to have occurred to Milton only.

When I arrive at the name of Milton in this cramped and scrambled record, I feel like the old farmer who had so much to do that he went fishing. There is so much to

say that I am tempted to say nothing. It was inevitable that Milton should acquaint himself with practically all of Dante's writings, and inevitable that his own writings should be pervaded with Dantean influence—because of his extensive scholarship, his love of Italy and Italian literature, the resemblance of his theme to Dante's, of his personality to Dante's. Temperamentally, he was as like Dante as Chaucer was unlike him: purposeful, austere, religious, and doctrinal, insistent on the freedom of the will, reformer by instinct, militant, fearless, actively and indignantly interested in current politics and a participant in events, heroically unhappy, dedicated to a mission, learned and philosophic, with an epic and cosmic imagination. He penetrated the substantive thought of Dante as Chaucer could not, and his mood, like Dante's, is grave. His knowledge of Dante began before he visited Italy, for the early poems, especially "Lycidas," show the Dante influence. He had some acquaintance with the "De Monarchia," the "Convivio," and the "Canzoniere," as is shown in his correspondence and commonplace book, but, of course, it was the "Divine Comedy" which most influenced him, and that influence is most obvious in "Paradise Lost."

Since the mid-eighteenth century there have been repeated comparisons between "Paradise Lost" and the "Divine Comedy." Such comparisons are inevitable; inevitable also the conclusion of Ruskin and Macaulay that the difference is as striking as the resemblance, that Milton is vague, Dante definite, or, as Macaulay states it:

"Milton avoids loathsome details, and takes refuge in indistinct but solemn and tremendous imagery," "gives us merely a vague idea of vast bulk." "The 'Divine Comedy' is a personal narrative. Dante is the eye-witness and ear-witness of that which he relates. . . . His own hands have

grasped the shaggy sides of Lucifer. His own feet have climbed the mount of expiation. His own brow has been marked by the purifying angel." Eighteenth-century pseudo-classicists preferred Milton's vagueness as more accordant with what was vaguely called "classic" and "proper," but nineteenth-century realism has taught us to prefer the concreteness of Dante. When we turn from the "Divine Comedy" to the "Paradise Lost," we seem to have left a world of reality for a bookish world, to be reading an historian's record of events instead of listening to a traveler's vivid story of what he himself experienced, for, whatever our theology, we are sure, when under the spell of the book, that Dante has been where he says he went, for seldom before or since has such convincing detail been given to a fictitious narrative. As we read we are all like the woman chatting in a doorway with her neighbors in Verona, who, seeing Dante pass along the street, whispered, "See, there is the man who was in Hell." The habitual association in the public mind of the names of Dante and Milton was amusingly illustrated in a newspaper recently. A news despatch from Washington reported a United States Senator referring to Milton and quoting him, but the hurried headline writer wrote "The Senator quotes Dante."

If seventeenth-century Englishmen, excepting Milton, were inappreciative of Dante, we should remember that he was neglected by his own countrymen in the latter seventeenth century. In the next century a fresh passion for Italian nationalism was to awake a strong fresh interest in Dante, but his fame in Italy was at its nadir in the seventeenth century, a circumstance which partly explains the fact that Addison never mentions Dante's name, though he journeyed extensively in Italy and visited the places most associated with Dante's fame. He probably heard little of

Dante from Dante's countrymen. The adjectives which seventeenth-century Englishmen apply to Dante, even when praising him, indicate how little they appreciated him. Jeremy Taylor refers to "an elegant expression of Dante," and Dryden talks of "Dante's polished page." "Elegant," "polished," favorite words with the classicists, but it would be hard to find adjectives less apt for Dante; it is as if one should talk of "the limpid flow of Browning's verse" or "the rugged energy of Tennyson."

Dante is a sort of spiritual thermometer by which to register the idealism of an individual or a literary epoch, and there was little idealism in the late seventeenth or the early eighteenth century. Men were more interested in the form of literature than in its substance, least interested in its spirit. "Propriety" was more important than inspiration. Common sense was the prime virtue, and Dantesque visions do not come by way of common sense.

What eighteenth-century Englishmen said about Dante throws no light on Dante, but additional light on what we already knew about eighteenth-century literary standards: Horace Walpole called Dante "a Methodist parson in Bedlam," "absurd, extravagant, disgusting"; Lord Chesterfield wrote to his son that "the easiest books are generally the best," and that Dante was too obscure to waste time on; Goldsmith was condescending and pronounced Dante fairly good considering the barbarous age in which he lived. There is the eighteenth century reflecting its own image in the Dante mirror: its self-complacency; its fallacy of barbarous and civilized ages; its assumption that civilization reached the world about the time that Charles II was restored to the throne and chose England as headquarters; its dislike of emotion in literature, its confidence in clarity as the first of the literary virtues, by which standard a Bill of

Lading would outrank the Prophecy of Isaiah as literature.

The same attitude is shown in Thomas Warton's long critique of Dante in his "History of English Poetry," but it is at least significant that by Warton's time Dante was reckoned of sufficient importance to be critically assessed at all. Dante is more intelligently and sympathetically assessed by Joseph Warton, brother of Thomas, in his "Essay on Pope." Indeed, Joseph Warton's comments on the "Inferno" make it unjust in my opinion to say, as does Toynbee, that Thomas Gray was the only eighteenth-century Englishman who appreciated Dante. Granted that Gray's knowledge was much more extensive than Warton's, I find no evidence that his appreciation was more intelligent. The first effort to estimate Dante as a poet is a curious mechanical affair, in Mark Akenside's "Balance of Poets"—wherein he attempts to grade twenty poets on a scale of twenty, "absolute perfection," which none attains; in the first group, with eighteen points each, are Homer and Shakespeare; Milton is alone in the second group with seventeen points; Virgil alone in the third group with sixteen points; in the fourth group, with fourteen points each, are Cervantes, Corneille, Molière, and Spenser. Dante is in the fifth group, along with Ariosto, Horace, Pindar, Pope, Racine, and Sophocles, each with thirteen points; however, fifth group is not failure, for there is a sixth group containing Boileau, Euripides, and Tasso, each with twelve points; and a seventh group in which are Lucretius and Terence, ten points each.

It will be observed that Dante's group is the most populous, seven poets—the middle group of respectable mediocrity. Voltaire's notorious attacks on Dante had a double effect in England: they encouraged witty English-

men to equally flippant criticisms, and at the same time they provoked ardent Italian patriots resident in England to rally to Dante's defense, to expose Voltaire's ignorance, and at the same time to expound Dante to English readers. By the end of the century Englishmen were reading more than they had ever read about Dante, and were reading numerous fragmentary translations of portions of the "Comedy," including Hayley's translation of the first three cantos of the "Inferno," and before the century ended Henry Boyd and Henry Francis Cary were engaged on their respective translations of the "Divine Comedy," though neither translation was finished and published until the nineteenth century.

Though by the end of the eighteenth century the Dante tide was flowing fairly strong toward the British coast, it was not until the nineteenth century that Englishmen plumbed the depths of his thought and art. It may fairly be said that general acquaintance with the "Divine Comedy" in England came with Cary's translation—remember that except for Boyd's version published twelve years earlier, a paraphrase rather than a translation, Englishmen hitherto could read the "Comedy" only in the original Italian or in Latin translation. Dean Plumptre, who many years later made a notable translation, said that after Cary's work became known, "no man aiming at literary reputation thought his education complete unless he had read Dante in Cary or in the original." Keats got his knowledge of the "Divine Comedy" from Cary, and Ruskin began the long study of Dante which was to yield rich harvest in Cary, though of course he presently learned to read the original. It remains to-day for many their sole access to Dante, for it is a classic in its own right. It was followed by many other translations, including Longfellow's, but it

has not been superseded. Too often it lacks vigor in phrasing, suggests eighteenth-century formalism, as, for instance, this, describing Dante's recognition, in "Inferno," XV, of his old poetic master, Brunetto Latini:

> I intently fixed my ken on his parched looks
> That although smirched with fire, they hindered not
> But I remembered him.

A prose translation of this passage by Alfred M. Brooks is better because more direct, and because the translator employs more concrete terms in which to render Dante's "cotto aspetto" and "viso abbruciato": "I fixed my eyes on his *burnt visage* so that even his *scorched features* did not prevent recognition." But when all is said, Cary's translation has two merits: it is readable and it seeks to render Dante's meaning, for it was not in pride of authorship that Cary wrote, but in the desire of a disciple to make his master's work accessible to English readers.

Lowell asserts that study of Dante did not become general in England and America until the mid-nineteenth century. It is true that in the first half of the century there was no such searching, accurate, and illuminating Dante scholarship as came with the latter half and continues to-day, represented by a multitude of names, such as Lowell's own name, Longfellow, Norton, Plumptre, Symonds, Church, the Rossettis, Moore, Wicksteed, Toynbee, and Grandgent. But English Dante scholarship *began* in the first half of the century, with Coleridge, the first I find to apply to Dante historical and philosophical principles of criticism, and a Dantean formative influence on *creative* authors, such as Byron and Shelley, Carlyle and Macaulay, was potent before the century had reached its middle stage—*mezzo del cammin*. After about 1820 the air thickens with Dante fol-

lowers, in number, though not in torment, like the flocking spirits beheld by Dante in the Second Circle—

> As cranes
> Chanting their dolorous notes, traverse the sky,
> Stretched out in long array.

No quantitative statement of Dante's influence on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American and English literature can suffice to measure that influence. No counting of authors and enumeration of their Dantean lines, phrases, and devices can tell us much about the effect on the souls of authors of becoming intimately acquainted with this great soul of Dante—one of the greatest that has walked in flesh. When reading those eighteenth-century critical futilities about what Thomas Warton called Dante's "want of art and method," for lack of which "everything is related circumstantially . . . and not in those general terms which are used by modern writers," I fall to wondering how much the study itself of Dante was responsible for the fact that nineteenth-century English and American literature became more circumstantial, literal, more specific, explicit, vivid, substituting realities for eighteenth-century pale generalities. Or who can say, in terms of measurement, what far-reaching and diffused effects Dante's mysticism had on nineteenth-century minds already inclined to transcendentalism; or how much his medievalism affected poets, painters, and theologians, who believed that a finer art and a truer religious concept had preceded the Renaissance; or what Dante's moral earnestness did to fortify the earnestness of those Victorian thinkers who were seeking lines of order in the political, social, or philosophical chaos of the time? In short, how much Dantean influence mingled with other influences to make nineteenth-century literature something so

different from that of the eighteenth century, cannot be tabulated. The majestic figure of Dante walks through nineteenth-century English literature in ways that are recognizable, but it also walks in other ways unperceived, a spirit purifying men's spirits, giving them finer vision and firmer judgment. Grandgent calls Dante "the mouthpiece of the Middle Ages," and so he was. Before he had been dead fifty years he was being studied as men studied Holy Writ. Commentators were busy with his text. Public lectureships were established to expound him in Florence, Bologna, Pisa, Venice, Piacenza. Probably no other poet has become so promptly a classic. But the commentators were most busy with the things that, on the whole, are secondary, textual interpretations, minutiæ of allegory, political and ecclesiastical references,—besides, Dante had put in hell a number of the friends and relatives of people still living, and naturally there had to be inquiry about that. That was a true saying we heard last Sunday, that to-day Dante is better understood than he was understood in his own century, better perhaps than he understood himself. The basic truth of him, the core of his message, becomes clearer as it is stripped of contemporary controversies, personalities, localisms, schematics; becomes clearer as men lay firmer hold on his central truth. Perhaps it required five centuries for the collective mind to grow up to Dante.

Nineteenth-century England came again under the enchantment of Italy:

> a spell beyond
> Her name in story, and her long array
> Of mighty shadows,

as Byron says it, adding,

> Thy very weeds are beautiful, thy waste
> More rich than other climes' fertility.

In this influence Dante was a leading figure, as he had not been in sixteenth-century Italian influence on England. Byron chants mournful requiems over Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, and Tasso, but most feelingly over Dante:

> Ungrateful Florence! Dante sleeps afar,
> Like Scipio, buried by the upbraiding shore.
> Thy factions, in their worse than civil war,
> Proscribed the bard whose name forevermore
> Their children's children would in vain adore,
> With the remorse of ages.
>
> Happier Ravenna! on thy hoary shore,
> Fortress of falling empire, honored sleeps
> The immortal exile.

It is not only in the "Childe Harold," but all through Byron's poetry that began with his Italian residence that we catch the echoes of Dante. Byron, who recreated all things in his own image, fancied similarities between his own fate and that of Dante, the exile, reputed unhappy in marriage: "There was somewhat of resemblance in our destinies—he had a wife, and I have the same feelings about leaving my bones in a strange land." Also there were those early love affairs: "I never wrote anything worth mentioning till I was in love. Dante dates his passion for Beatrice at twelve [Byron's error—Dante was only nine]. I was almost as young when I fell over head and ears in love." Finally Byron, like other Italian patriots, saw in Dante the prophet of Italian freedom and unification. It is in this conception that Byron wrote his "Prophecy of Dante" in terza-rima, in which measure he had previously written a translation of the Paolo and Francesca episode. Subsequently he said that "terza rima does not seem to suit the genius of English poetry—it is certainly uncalculated for a work of any length. In our language it may do for a short

ode"—which may be an indirect compliment to Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," published a year before in stanzas of terza-rima measure. In my opinion Byron is correct in that judgment; surely Italian terza-rima derives its charm, in part, from the soft, unaccented terminal syllables—in which the English language is not rich.

Byron's friend Leigh Hunt was temporarily incapable of appreciating the stronger and deeper things in Dante, and seemed to think it clever to refer to Dante as "bilious" and to the "Divine Comedy" as a "sublime nightmare," but nevertheless he was a student of it, wrote considerably about Dante, and "founded," as he himself said, his "Story of Rimini" "on the beautiful episode of Paolo and Francesca in the fifth book of the 'Inferno' where it stands like a lily in the mouth of Tartarus"—the first of several poems and plays based on that immortal tragedy, including plays by the American George H. Boker and the English Stephen Phillips.

Of the Italianate trio, Byron, Shelley, and Hunt, Shelley caught most of Dante's mystery. "No English poet," says Kuhns, "has so completely assimilated the works of Dante as he." At first repelled by Dante's harshness, Shelley endured him for the "fortunate isles laden with golden fruit, which alone could tempt any one to embark in the misty ocean of his dark and extravagant fiction," but ere long, reading Dante alone, and aloud to his wife, he learned to esteem him second in an epic triumvirate in which he placed Homer first and Milton third, knew the "Convivio," "Canzoniere," and "Vita Nuova" as well as the "Divine Comedy," translated a number of Dante passages, referred to him frequently in his prose works and correspondence, echoed Dante's lines in many of his own lines. But these external facts tell nothing. There is no better illustration than Shel-

ley of what I was saying a moment ago about the *intangible* influences of Dante. Dante *pervades* the poetry of Shelley. Kuhns speaks, not extravagantly, of "the complete saturation" of Shelley's mind with Dante. Shelley addressed his "Epipsychidion" to those who could understand Dante's "Vita Nuova," "without a matter-of-fact history of the circumstances to which it relates," and he attached a translation of the first canzone of the "Convivio," which, together with a statement made elsewhere about the "Epipsychidion," "As to real flesh and blood you know that I do not deal in these articles," is a fair warning that if we cannot understand the *spirit* of "Epipsychidion," we shall not get much help to an understanding from merely learning the facts of the life of Emilia Viviani, the Italian girl who inspired the poem. The "Epipsychidion" and the "Prometheus Unbound" are the two poems of Shelley most "saturated," to use Kuhns' word, in the spirit of Dante and in Dante's mystic conception of love, a conception into whose subtleties Shelley entered as few moderns can; and the best commentaries on these poems are the "Vita Nuova" and the "Paradiso," which was inevitably Shelley's favorite cantica of the "Divine Comedy" (he called the "Paradiso" "a perpetual hymn of everlasting love").

But all of this is not to say that Shelley reflected the whole of Dante's concept of love. He could not. He had not the gristle. Is it not true that the most sublime quality of the "Divine Comedy" is the gradual emergence of the principle of love in the "Paradiso" after the terrors of the "Inferno" and the agonized expiations of the "Purgatorio"? It is the more distinct because of the black sultry background. The love of Dante is the more impressive because of the sternness of Dante. Browning referred to:

> Dante, who loved well because he hated,
> Hated wickedness that hinders loving,

and Dante himself said in the "Convivio": "But inasmuch as everything is lovable in itself, and as naught is to be hated save for the evil superinduced upon it, it is reasonable and right to hate not things, but their badness, and to strive to sever it from them."

Beatrice in Canto XXX of the "Paradiso" tells Dante:

> Forth from the last corporeal are we come
> Into the heaven that is unbodied light;
> Light intellectual, replete with love;
> Love of true happiness, replete with joy;
> Joy, that transcends all sweetness of delight.

In Dante is the strength of love, not its softness; it is militant, like wrath, but tender as the compassion in the eyes of Beatrice. It was a weakness of Shelley to end his poetic heroes in martyrdom. They were loving and lovely in life and death, but it is difficult to see what they accomplish either by living or dying. It is love triumphant, because strong with the strength of God, that we envision in the "Paradiso." The spirit of Shelley is beautiful, but, after all, Matthew Arnold chose the right word when he called it "ineffectual."

Shelley and Carlyle illustrate the street-sign simile of Lowell's. It was the sterner side of Dante that appealed to Carlyle. Shelley was drawn to Dante in spite of his theology; Carlyle, in part, because of his theology. Mentally and morally, Thomas Carlyle was more like Dante than any British author since Milton. The grim Scotch Presbyterian that remained in Carlyle to the end responded to the stern theology of the Catholic Dante. Carlyle warmly commended Dante's "reflections on fortune, free will, and the

nature of sin," where, by "fortune," I take it, Carlyle understood predestination. Though his lecture-essays on Dante most frequently refer to the "Inferno," he expressed a strong preference for the "Purgatorio": "There is no book so moral as this," he says, "the very essence of Christian morality." "For life is but a series of errors made good again by repentance." If we think only of the bitterness of Carlyle, and his firm fixed faith in the devil (in "Sartor Resartus" he cries out in exasperation with a skeptical world, "One cannot so much as believe in the devil now!"), it may seem that he would have preferred the "Inferno," but, as in Dante, his harshness was but the reverse side of a tender nature, amazed at a froward world and yearning to shock it into care for its own salvation.

Carlyle learned to read the "Divine Comedy" in the original, though Froude says he found it "uphill work." Wild inaccuracies have been pointed out in his two lectures on Dante, but, on the other hand, Cary makes repeated acknowledgments in his notes to his revised translation of corrections suggested by Carlyle. Apparently he read the text closely, but took hurried notes for his lectures and failed to verify a number of his statements. Whatever his omissions and commissions, his blunders in detail, his lectures on Dante constitute a memorable performance. He was primarily neither historian nor literary critic, but biographer and moralist, and in Dante he found a congenial theme, a great man who wrote a great book. He calls Dante "one of the greatest men that ever lived," "great in all directions, in his wrath, his scorn, his pity. Great above all in his sorrow." With that power of word portraiture in which few could equal him, perhaps only Dante himself, as in the picture of Farinata, Carlyle draws in words the picture of Dante's face and soul. He had been studying

Dante's face in a picture which he thought was that ascribed to Giotto, but was really by Tofanelli—the alleged Giotto portrait was discovered under the whitewash in the Bargello two months after Carlyle delivered his lecture: "I think it is the mournfullest face that was ever painted from reality; an altogether tragic, heart-affecting face. There is in it, as foundation of it, the softness, tenderness, gentle affection as of a child; but all this is as if congealed into sharp contradiction, into abnegation, isolation, proud, hopeless pain. . . . Withal it is a silent pain too . . . the lip is curled in a kind of godlike disdain of the thing that is eating out his heart. . . . The face of one wholly in protest, and life-long unsurrendering battle against the world. Affection all converted into indignation; an implacable indignation; slow, equable, silent like that of a god. The eye, too, it looks out as in a kind of *surprise,* a kind of enquiry, Why the world was of such a sort?"

Carlyle admires Dante for his inflexible sense of justice, his sincerity, his "intensity"—"a narrow and even sectarian mind. . . . He is world-great, not because he is world-wide but because he is world-deep." He admires Dante for his scorn of what Carlyle calls "moral trimmers," was fascinated by the third canto of the "Inferno," where is neither Hell, Heaven, nor Purgatory, but the neutral ground of the luke-warm,

> the wretched souls of those who lived
> Without or praise or blame . . .
> . . . Those of death
> No hope may entertain.

Here is poor old Pope Celestine V, who abdicated the papal throne. Here also Carlyle would have put him, like Dante, not commending his meekness, but despising his pusillanimity.

Carlyle, master of metaphor, naturally praises the metaphors of Dante, and Ruskin, with the eye of a painter as well as the word-magic of a rhetorician, comments frequently and voluminously on Dante's word-pictures, as, for instance, the realism in the twelfth canto of the "Inferno," where, with the notch of his arrow, Chiron parts his thick beard back from his mouth before speaking. References to Dante as word-painter are strewn through "Modern Painters," "Stones of Venice," "Val d'Arno," and others of Ruskin's works. Ruskin emphasizes what he calls "the precision of the medieval eye for color," and undertakes, by several analyses, to show that Dante "distinguishes color precisely as a painter would." In language scarcely less luminous than Dante's own, he analyzes Dante's faculty of painting flame, concluding a passage, too long to read, with, "It is lambent annihilation." He dwells on Dante's "treatment" (in the painter's sense of the word) of forests, rocks, and mountains. He compares Dante with Giotto, as two artists working in different media, both characterized by strong intellectual powers. Of course Dante appealed equally to Ruskin as moralist and mystic: Ruskin pauses in the Ducal Palace in Venice to discuss Dante's gradations of vice and the "profound truth," as he calls it, of placing Sadness in so deep a hell-pit, the fifth circle, and comments on the "guilt of sadness."

In the course of this commentary he remarks that the "Paradiso" is less read than the "Inferno," because it requires far greater attention, and, perhaps, for its full enjoyment, a holier heart. After Ruskin began his Dante study in Italy in 1845, we learn from Charles Eliot Norton that, "From this time, for many years, perhaps no book, with the exception of the Bible, was his more constant companion than the 'Divine Comedy,' either in the original or

in Cary's well-known translation," and Toynbee remarks that Ruskin's "works probably contain more quotations from the 'Divina Commedia' than those of any other English writer." It is in "Stones of Venice" that Ruskin makes the oft-quoted remark, "I think that the central man of all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest, is Dante." "The Central Man of All the World" is the title of one of the new books on Dante.

A fascinating topic would be Rossetti and the Preraphaelite School, on whom and which the Dante influence was fundamental and formative. The method of that art was Dante's method, mysticism and realism, truth through symbols; its spirit was the spirit of Dante's age, the age that preceded Raphael and the Renaissance. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the Italian poet's namesake, together with his father, Gabriele, his brother, William Michael, and his sister, Maria Francesca, I had anticipated as one of my chief topics in this lecture, as certainly it should have been one of the most interesting and romantic, for the "feel" of Dante's art is in this family, especially in the pictures and the poetry of Dante Gabriel. But the six hundred years refuse to be compressed into the sixty minutes, and I must be silent about the Rossettis.

Silent also about many another important figure of the later time, including two preëminent ones, Browning and Tennyson, one with his "Sordello," the other with his "Ulysses," both suggested by passages in the "Divine Comedy"; both of those great English poets had a lifelong devotion for the greater Italian, vestiges of whose influence are scattered in the poetry of each.

Let us conclude a prosaic narrative with two brief bits of poetry, one from each of these poets: the first from "One

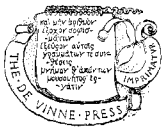
Word More," one of Browning's most beautiful poems, addressed to his wife, in which, to illustrate a point, he poetizes an incident of the "Vita Nuova," in which Dante relates how, on the anniversary of the death of Beatrice, he was painting a picture of an angel when he was interrupted by visitors:

> Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
> Whom to please? You whisper "Beatrice."
> While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
> . . . . . .
> Dante, who loved well because he hated,
> Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
> Dante standing, studying his angel,—
> In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
> Says he—"Certain people of importance"
> (Such he gave his daily, dreadful line to)
> "Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."
> Says the poet, "Then I stopped my painting."

The other is by Tennyson, written in 1865, when Florence was celebrating the six hundredth anniversary of Dante's birth, as we are memorializing the six hundredth anniversary of his death, and the Florentines requested a poem from Tennyson for the occasion, and this is what he sent:

> King, that hast reign'd six hundred years, and grown
> In power, and ever growest, since thine own
> Fair Florence honoring thy nativity,
> Thy Florence now the crown of Italy,
> Hath sought the tribute of a verse from me,
> I, wearing but the garland of a day,
> Cast at thy feet one flower that fades away.

STOCKTON AXSON.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